

TE HEKE RANGATIRA

The Disappearing Band of Chiefs

The waka and Wairarapa Moana



Tūnuiārangi Paraone with a large waka and large hīnaki near Lake Ferry. Unknown photographer, Museum of NZ Te Papa Tongarewa. This photo is thought to have been taken in 1904 during a visit to Wairarapa Moana by the Scenery Preservation Commission of which Tūnuiārangi was a Commissioner. Te Heke Rangatira was uplifted from Lake Ferry in early 1905

Polynesians were accomplished navigators who used the sun, stars, moon, wind and sea currents to explore vast areas of the Pacific and on their return told of their encounters with new lands and people. The ancestors of Wairarapa iwi voyaged from their ancient homelands in eastern Polynesia in the twelfth century to the land discovered by Kupe and named Aotearoa. Commenting on these inherited skills in the early 1900's, Wairarapa rangatira Tunuiarangi told Elsdon Best that canoe travelling and sea fishing meant that Maori were extremely adept in the detection of weather signs.

Waka were most commonly used by Maori as transport and for fishing. There are three main types of waka, the twin hull (*waka hourua*), the single hull with outrigger (*waka ama*), and the single hull without outrigger of which there are three classes *waka taua*, *waka tete* and *waka tiwai*. Waka hourua and waka ama became obsolete but were still in existence when Cook visited. Best recorded that a dismantled waka hourua named Nga-toto belonging to Tahuahi was seen on the Wairarapa coastline in the mid-1800's. Wairarapa rangatira Te Whatahoro told Best of a *short coastal trip* from Waimarama to Te Unuunu (approximate 185 kilometres) which he made as a 16 year old in 1853 on a waka ama with 15 others.



Waka at Waihēnga Martinborough, 1968. Photograph Foss Leach

The single hull waka were the only waka that survived into the post-contact period. The waka taua or war canoe is large and was used to carry warriors into battle. They are typically highly decorated with carved stern (*taurapa*) and prow (*tauihu*) which is the form of waka that Te Heke Rangatira has become. The generally smaller and less ornate waka tete and plain waka tiwai were used for travel and also fishing.

The value of waka to iwi is apparent in the exchange which occurred between Rangitane living alongside Wairarapa Moana and a Ngati Kahungunu party arriving at Lake Onoke from Heretaunga in the 16th century. Ngati Kahungunu were in search of a new home and the only price acceptable to Rangitane for giving up their lands to the new migrants was the waka which they needed for their journey south.

Te Heke Rangatira was gifted to the National Museum in 1905 by its former owner Ani Hiko, the daughter of Wairarapa Moana rangatira, Te Hiko-o-te-rangi. In a letter to Gilbert Mair, who was probably acting as an agent for the Museum, Ani explained that she had *no further use for the waka* which was operating at the time as part of the ferry service across Lake Onoke.

Ani Hiko's letter went on to say *Ko te ingoa o te waka ko te Hekerangatira no te tau i matemate ai nga rangatira ka tapaia tenei ingoa a Te Hekerangatira*. Mair translated this as *The name of the old canoe is Te Heke Rangatira (The disappearing band of chiefs). It was so named at the time the chiefs of this district were overwhelmed*. This wording suggests that the waka was already built at the time this calamity occurred contrary to the idea that it was built for the ferry service.

Te Heke Rangatira was built from a single totara log and variously described by Best as a plain fishing-canoe and a specimen of the *second class of Maori vessels*, waka tete, used in sea-fishing, coastal voyages and also in war expeditions, accommodating at least twenty men on a sea-fishing trip. Best also alludes to the use of Te Heke Rangatira in the ferry service and states that it is a modern waka, having been built in the 1870's and *used principally for carrying cargo on the Wairarapa Lake*.

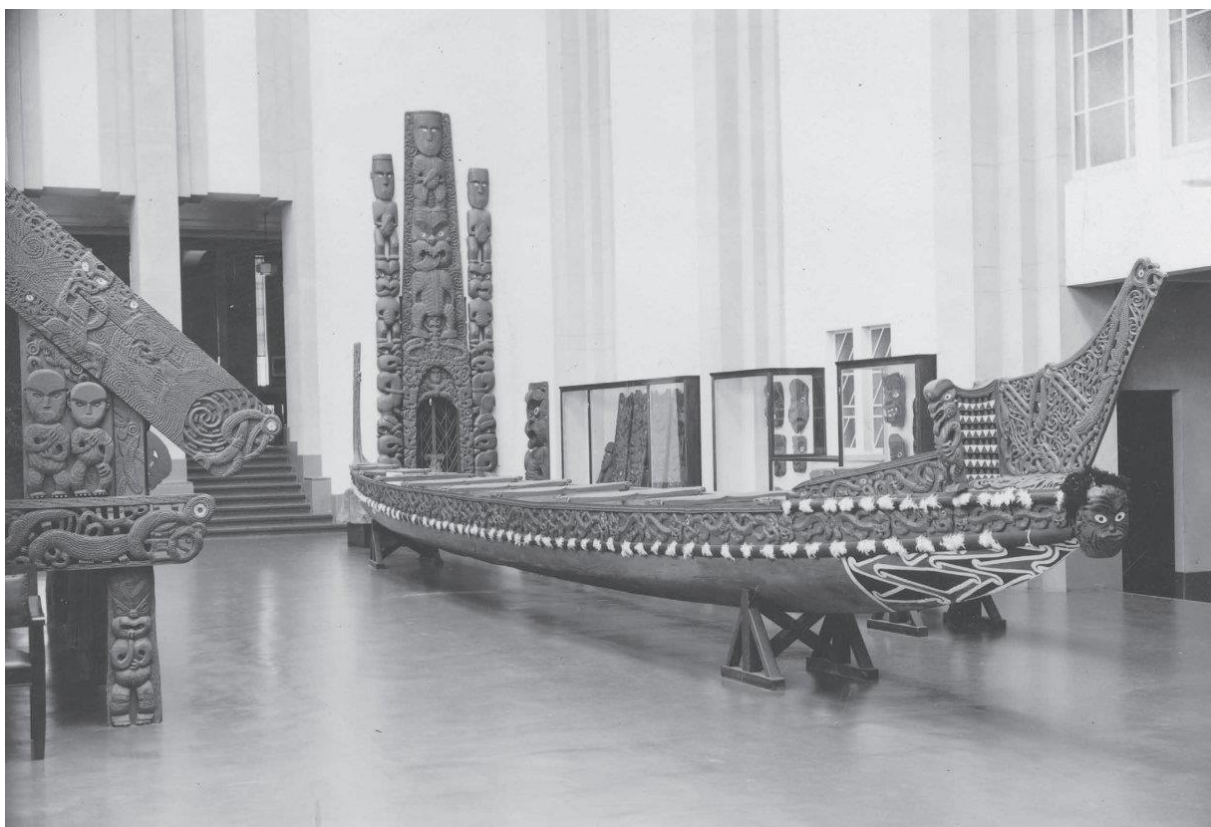
There are several different explanations for the origin of the name Te Heke Rangatira. Best states that the waka was named after the Heke (migration) of Ngati Kahungunu from Heretaunga which is referred to earlier. Mair suggests that the waka takes its name from an accident in the early forties when a number of the principal Wairarapa Chiefs were drowned in Cooks Straits. This probably refers to the drowning in 1844 of two significant rangatira, Te Kai-a-te-kokopu and Tu-te-pakihi-rangi, in Palliser Bay.



Mrs Te Heke-Rangatira Boyd, 9.6.1955, Christchurch Star-Sun

However the most likely derivation of the name Te Heke Rangatira comes from Mrs Te Heke-Rangatira Boyd of Greytown who visited the waka in June 1955 at the Canterbury Museum. She maintained that the name of the waka, like her own, is derived from the 1820's migration of Wairarapa iwi to Nukutaurua on the Mahia Peninsula in Hawke's Bay and is a shortened version of Te Heke Rangatira ki Nukutaurua. The movement of Wairarapa iwi to Nukutaurua in the 1820's took place after an attack on them in the Cape Palliser region by Wellington based iwi and among those killed was Te Maari-o-te-rangi, a senior Wairarapa rangatira, after whom Piripi Te Maari was named.

From the very beginning, the Dominion Museum's intentions for Te Heke Rangatira to be transformed into a waka taua were clear. In his response to Ani Hiko's letter giving the waka to the museum, Augustus Hamilton, the Museum Director, wrote that *he was very pleased that the canoe will be placed in the Museum* and that it was to be fitted up *with beautiful adornments of a war canoe* in memory of the *disappearing band of chiefs*. In the Maori version of the letter this was translated as *Ka rauawatia, puhi puhi rawa ki te toroa me ona taonga katoa a ka ata waiho hei Whakamaharatanga ki te ao mo te Heke Onga Rangatira*. The alteration of taonga Maori in museums was common practice then, something not tolerated today.



Te Heke Rangatira on display in the Dominion Museum in Wellington. Photographer unidentified, ca 1936, PAColl-3033-1-13, Cowan Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington

Despite this clear intention, it wasn't until 1926 that Tamati (Thomas) Heberley, a Te Atiawa carver, was employed by the Museum and subsequently Tamati carved the rauawa, tauihu and taurapa of Te Heke Rangatira. According to the late Roger Neich, the tauihu is copied from a famous Ngati Tarawhai (Te Arawa) carving in the Berlin-Dahlem Ethnological Museum. and that the original tauihu is a unique form and most likely came from a canoe named Te Arawa which was carved in the 1860's by Ngati Tarawhai carver Anaha Te Rahui. Best is critical of the rauawa or top-strakes claiming that they are of European design and woefully inaccurate.



Wood carver Thomas Heberley with a school group, inside the Dominion Museum's Sydney Street shed, Wellington, ca1932. Photo from Dominion Post, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington

It was probably the acquisition in 1930 of the Whanganui waka, Teremoe, parts of which Tamati Heberley also carved, that led to the National Museum agreeing to loan Te Heke Rangatira to the Canterbury Museum in 1949. A dismantled Te Heke Rangatira was accompanied to Christchurch by museum carver, Iotua Tuarau, whose work on refitting the waka with its carvings was documented on film by Ernest Adams. Te Heke Rangatira remained on display at the Canterbury Museum until November 1993 when it was finally returned to the National Museum in Wellington.

Augustus Hamilton's letter was very clear in accepting the waka in 1905. Its transformation into a waka taua for display at the museum would honour the memory of the *Disappearing Band of Chiefs* and he intended that it would always be accessible to its people. It is deplorable then that Te Heke Rangatira spent nearly fifty years on display in the Canterbury museum inaccessible to its people and without its provenance being fully understood or communicated. Since its return to Te Papa, apart from a brief visit to the Wairarapa it has languished unseen in storage.



*Te Arawa Canoe Tauihu in the Berlin-Dahlem Ethnological Museum.
Photo Staatliche Museen Zu Berlin – Preussischer Kulturbesitz Museum
Für Völkerkunde*

From the mid-1980's local Wairarapa iwi historian Mita Carter took a strong interest in Te Heke Rangatira and began advocating for its return to his South Wairarapa iwi. In 1995 Te Heke Rangatira did return for a few days to the Wairarapa for display as part of a regional kapa haka festival at the Masterton Town Hall. Earlier this year, local iwi, accompanied by Ani Hiko's whanau, travelled to Te Papa to tono (request) for the return of Te Heke Rangatira for this exhibition. Wairarapa iwi believe that the original intention of the gifting of Te Heke Rangatira to the National Museum can only be fulfilled by having it permanently housed on display in the Wairarapa.



Te Heke Rangatira on display at Canterbury Museum. Photo courtesy of Canterbury Museum

References:

- Elsdon Best, *The Maori Canoe*
- Captain Gilbert Mair, Translation of Ani Hiko letter 12.12.1904
- Roger Neich: Letter to National Museum dated 14.11.1986
- Roger Neich: *Carved Histories*

Following page: *Translation of Ani Hiko's letter gifting Te Heke Rangatira, 12 December 1904, Gilbert Mair*

Forwards

Marlinborough

December 12th 1904

Friend Captain Wain.

Salutations to you, may you live long and have
joy and prosperity during the approaching New Year.

Friend, I have received your letter asking about the
Canoe. It is correct, Taniarangi has also written to
me on the same subject and inquiring whether I would
sell it. I have delayed replying as he is at Olago,
and have been waiting for his return so he might see
me on this subject at my own place. But now your
letter has arrived, on behalf of the Government, for this
keivloom of my ancestors. Well, Friend, a great many
Europeans have sought to purchase this same
Canoe, but I would not consent to part with it.
However, my Friend Tawa, I will now give this
Canoe into the hands of the Government and it
will remain for the Government to make what
return it thinks fit. Let the Canoe be sent for
at once. Long life and health to you.

The name of the old Canoe is, "Te Heke-
Rangatira" (The disappearing band of Chiefs) It was
so named at the time the Chiefs of this
District were overwhelmed.

From your Loving Sister

Arii Hikitearangi.

Written by your Mother in Law:
Wi Hukana.

O Tawa. I am too old now to make any use
of a boat.

Note. I think, it was in the early forties that a number of the principal
Wairarapa Chiefs were drowned in Cook's Straits. All the survivors took names
connected with fish, such as "Ngatire", Pirihi Te Maori &c. Remains